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Automotive News

April 13, 1987

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Dacia rights apparently go to N.Y. firm

Roman Motors still claims import deal

By John A. Russell
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The Romanian government apparently has chosen a New York firm over Roman Motors Corp. of Miami to certify, import and market Dacia sedans, station wagons and pickups in the United States.

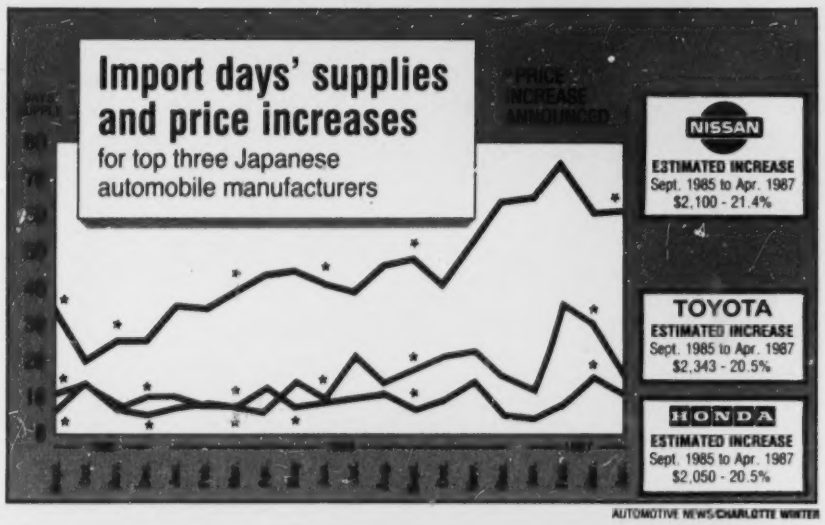
North American Import/Export Co. of New Paltz, N.Y., was named "our only official agent and representative in the United States for importation, distribution, sales and service" in documents signed April 3 in Romania by Ion Stamatescu, managing director of the Auto Dacia Foreign Trade Co.

It was not immediately clear what the effect would be on the approximately 70 dealers signed by Roman Motors, many of whom paid that company up to $59,900 for parts, signs and tools and signed backup letters of credit for $500,000.

Roman Motors President John E. Trotman said he did not believe North American's authorization had the seal of the Romanian Council of Ministers in Bucharest and that the situation would be clarified in meetings in Romania this week.

But a high Romanian official in the U.S. confirmed the agreement between Auto Dacia and North American. Trotman termed that confirmation a "last ditch" effort by Romanian diplomats in the U.S. to save themselves. But Trotman added that if he were proven wrong and the North American appointment legitimate, "We'll do what we have to do."

see DACIA, page 73



AUTOMOTIVE NEWS/CHARLOTTE WINTER

U.S. woes pile up for Japanese; yen, prices, dealer stocks climb

By John K. Teahen Jr. and Arthur Flax
AUTOMOTVE NEWS STAFF REPORTERS

The formula is simple: The Japanese yen skyrockets against the dollar, Japanese manufacturers raise prices to adjust, buyers act more slowly — especially in the wake of $2,000-plus price hikes — and supplies of Japanese-built cars rise.

In a nutshell, that's what's happening to Japanese manufacturers in the U.S. market right now — while some even brace for the shock of shocks, that they might not be able to sell their shares of the 2.3 million planned Japanese imports.

The story begins in the late summer of 1985, when the yen began its steady appreciation against the dollar. Since then, prices have been raised six times on the leading makes of Japanese cars.

Last week, the yen closed at 142 to the dollar on the foreign-exchange charts. It broke the 150 barrier on March 23, just three days after Toyota posted its latest U.S. price hike. Nissan acted 11 days later, when the rate was 146. Honda was the first of the Big Three to hike prices this time, but the yen was at 153 when it announced its Feb. 27 boost.

Since September 1985, the yen has risen about 65 percent against the dollar, moving from an exchange rate of 235-240 to the current 142.

And, as prices have gone up, sales — as reflected in the days' supplies of Japanese cars — have slowed. In fact, they have slowed so much that some Japanese manufacturers question whether all Japanese makers will even sell their shares of the current 2.3 million imports from Japan. Particularly vulnerable would be smaller companies such as Mitsubishi, Subaru, Isuzu and Suzuki.

The effects are being felt from corporate headquarters in Japan, where profits are down precipitously, to the showroom floor.

Some dealers say higher prices have hurt sales and profits; others haven't had any real problems with the higher stickers.

Dan Slattery, general sales manager at Bill Page Toyota in Falls Church, Va., said car sales are quite strong although sales of the Cressida, Toyota's highest-priced sedan, are lagging slightly.

see JAPANESE, page 70

Older cars live on; alter Chrysler plan

By Mary Connelly and Al Fleming
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTERS

DETROIT — Chrysler Motors will continue assembly of K- and E-body cars at its Jefferson Avenue plant through the 1988 model year and likely until construction of an all-new plant is completed in 1991.

The plant had been expected to produce trucks between 1988 and 1991, but that plan has been shelved, according to company sources.

The move to continue producing K- and E-body models brings to four the number of Chrysler body styles that were scheduled to be discontinued but will now remain in dealer showrooms in the 1988 model year.

Chrysler has also said it will continue the L-body Chrysler Omni America and Plymouth Horizon America, which had been scheduled to end with the 1987 model year.

In addition, in 1986 the company reversed its decision to end production of its large M-body Chrysler Fifth Avenue, Dodge Diplomat and Plymouth Gran Fury models and took the unprecedented step of subcontracting assembly with American Motors, the automaker it is now poised to take over with the purchase of Renault's holdings in AMC stock.

The rescued 10 models in four body styles accounted for 58.44 percent of Chrysler's total passenger car sales in the United States in 1986 and 52.06 percent in the first quarter of 1987. And, because tooling and development costs for those products already have been amortized and incremental unit profits are higher, Automotive News estimates that as much as $750 million of Chrysler Motors' $1.1 billion 1986 profit came from those 10 models.

The 10 models are the L-bodies, Dodge Omni America and Plymouth Horizon America; the K-bodies, Plymouth Reliant and Dodge Aries; the E-bodies, Dodge 600, Plymouth Caravelle and Chrysler New Yorker; the M-bodies, Chrysler Fifth Avenue, Dodge Diplomat and Plymouth Gran Fury.

see CHRYSLER, page 70

GM25: *Will car buyers believe Corsica, Beretta symbolize GM's commitment to quality?*

By Michelle Krebs
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Chevrolet has called the Corsica and Beretta its most important cars since 1955, but the cars are even more important to General Motors for reasons far beyond the machines themselves.

For the corporation, the cars symbolize the new GM as the first major products since GM's reorganization began in January 1984.

The cars are GM's attempt to convince the public of the automaker's commitment to quality and its willingness to respond to customer demands. They also are the hub of a GM campaign to increase sales of North American cars in Europe (story on Page 69).

"When we reorganized North American car operations, we did it to make better quality decisions and to get to the marketplace in a shorter time," said GM President F. James McDonald.

"Coming out of the chute, these vehicles have met their quality objectives and capital objectives."

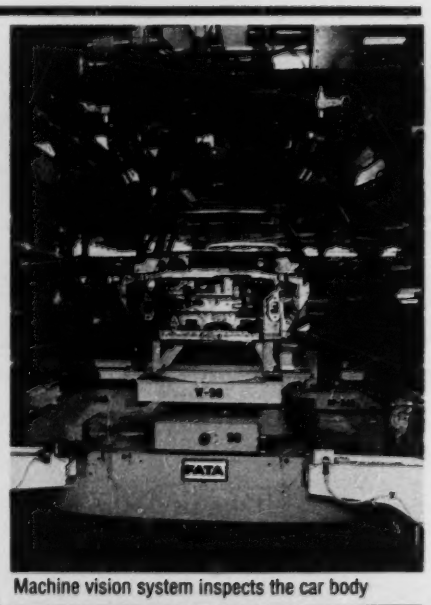
Robert Schultz, GM vice president and group executive of the Chevrolet-Pontiac-Canada Group, said the cars met their objectives.

"Field stocks that Chevy needed for announcement day were on time," he said. "The quality of the cars met all of our goals."

Chevrolet dealers contacted agreed the Corsica and Beretta have met their objectives. Dealers said the launch of the cars has been the most successful since the introduction of the Citation in 1979. By the official introduction day (March 12), dealers had ordered 125,000 cars. Retail sales as of March 31 were 12,458.

McDonald said the GM reorganization was a traumatic change for nearly everyone in GM. Thousands of people were moved around to new jobs. The engineering departments were reduced from six in the car divisions to two in the car groups. Product engineers and process engineers were put together in the same room to simultaneously engineer the car and engineer the process to build the car.

see GM, page 38



Machine vision system inspects the car body

Greenwald, Mercer to open World Congress

DETROIT — Two executives who gained renown by helping their companies survive near-disastrous crises will keynote the 12th Annual Automotive News World Congress, to be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn, Mich., July 26-29.

Delivering the State of the Industry address on Sunday evening, July 26, will be Gerald Greenwald, chairman of Chrysler Motors.

He played a major role in Chrysler's comeback from financial calamity in the 1980s, and currently is one of the chief strategists in the corporation's proposed acquisition of American Motors.

Greenwald's co-speaker at this year's opening session will be Ro-

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Sales rate rises; days' supply dips Page 74

Audi doubles ad budget in recovery try

By David Versical
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Audi of America will double its advertising budget over the next 12 months as it continues its counterattack against the damaging publicity surrounding the Audi 5000.

The company will also drop the Audi 4000 and Audi 5000 names on future editions of those models, Volkswagen of America Vice President John Damoose, who heads the Audi operations, said last week. Though that move had been planned before the company's current troubles began, it could further distance Audi from the sudden-acceleration problems surrounding the Audi 5000-S.

The Center for Auto Safety and other groups have charged that seven deaths and hundreds of injuries have resulted when Audi 5000s with automatic transmissions accelerated uncontrollabiy after being shifted from park into drive or reverse. Damoose, saying the Audi is "the safest car in the world," told the Detroit Auto Writers Group that a shift-lock device, standard on all 1987 models, will substantially reduce the acceleration incidents.

The marketing measures are part of Audi's ongoing effort to restore confidence in the Audi name and boost sales. The first significant step — a $5,000 rebate offer on a 1987 Audi to current owners and lessees of late-model Audis — was designed to "stop the bleeding," said Damoose, who left Chrysler Corp. in November to head Audi. Sales of all Audi models in the United States slipped 19 percent in 1986 [illegible] are down about 6,000 units through the first quarter of 1987.

Incentives are likely to be offered on Audi models other than the 5000 for some time to come, Damoose predicted. They will be part of a marketing effort to turn the company around.

"We are about to launch a whole series of programs," Damoose said. "It's going to take a lot of money to do that. It's a business crisis of the first order."

The early steps have been aimed at those who know Audi best — its current customers. In addition to the rebate offer, which lasts 90 days, Audi plans to send a videotape demonstrating the car's safety to the estimated 2,500 Audi 5,000 owners.

And in July, it will launch an unprecedented ad campaign focusing on the cars' technological and safety features. Damoose would not specify how much the program will cost, but Advertising Age estimates the outlay at $80 million.

Damoose said most of the record outlay will be borne by Audi's German parent, Volkswagen AG.

AUTOMOTIVE NEWS/JOE WILSSENS

VWoA Vice President John Damoose

That campaign will tie into this fall's planned launch of the Audi 4000 replacement, which will be known as the Audi 80 and Audi 90. The all-new car, which Damoose said has been highly successful in Europe, will be upscale from the current Audi 4000. Eight to 10 months after introduction, Audi will add a coupe version of the car to its U.S. lineup, he said.

In mid-1988 Audi will upgrade the 5000 model and rename it, probably using the Audi 100 and Audi 200 names used in Europe, Damoose said. He confirmed the new 200-based Quattro will be offered with the V-8 being developed by Audi. "We're going to start to really market the Quattro," he said.

Many of the ideas for the current marketing campaign have come from a group of Audi officials and five select dealers who meet at least twice monthly to develop programs aimed at Audi's revival. Initial response to the $5,000 rebates has been positive, Damoose said.

Damoose explained the sudden acceleration incidents as: floor mats that have interfered with the accelerator; the position of the brake pedals and the accelerator; the idle-speed stabilizer; and drivers hitting the wrong pedal.

The company has issued a series of recalls to correct those problems and has designed the changes into new models. The shift-lock device, which requires the brake to be depressed before the car can be put into gear, "seems to be reduce the problem substantially," Damoose said.

He called sudden acceleration an industry-wide problem that has afflicted Audi more than any other carmaker.

He predicted that if the company's recovery is successful, U.S. sales could reach the 100,000 level in three or four years. Audi sold 74,061 cars in 1985.

Illinois asks all states to help in Audi matter

By Helen Kahn
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

WASHINGTON — Neil F. Hartigan, attorney general for Illinois, has sent a letter to all state attorneys general, asking them to join Illinois in seeking a nationwide solution to alleged sudden-acceleration problems of Audi 5000s.

Hartigan's representatives said response from the other state attorneys general has been "substantial," but they declined to say how many or what kinds of responses they have received.

The letter suggests:

- "Promoting public dialogue and awareness through a public hearing mechanism."
- "Litigation such as a mandamus action against NHTSA to force that agency to correctly implement vehicle defect notification procedures . . . and/or to issue a mandatory safety recall order to the manufacturer."
- Or an "injunction and restitution action against the manufacturer on behalf of the state and consumers."

The letter from Hartigan noted that an existing suit is similar to the last option. It was filed in Chicago's Cook County Court on behalf of individual owners of Audi 5000s and a leasing company, and seeks damages for the loss in resale value of Audi 5000s.

Audi of America said it was surprised by Hartigan's letter — it had not seen a final draft — and called it unwarranted. "We are continuing our ongoing dialogue with him, and we have agreed to meet with Mr. Hartigan and his representatives to discuss the concerns outlined in his letter," the company said in a prepared statement.

Hartigan told his fellow state legal officers that of the 250,000-plus Audi 5000s sold to date, about one in every 180 has experienced unwanted acceleration and that he and the consumer group Center for Auto Safety consider "inadequate" Audi's actions so far.

Hartigan said Audi's fix, which automatically applies the brake when shifting, "presumes that drivers have not already been depressing the brake pedal before shifting."

Audi also suggested inspection of the idle stabilization valve in its recall notice. It said that of the cars equipped with the shift-lock device, the complaint rate has been one in 7,500 cars. It also said the installation rate for the devices is running about 80 percent, and that should make its recall one of the most widely implemented.

Hartigan's letter said the Audi voluntary notice to 5000-model owners does not meet the regulatory requirements of an official defect notification letter. Audi of America disputes this, saying its statutory recall was announced Jan. 15, 1987. Official recall letters must clearly state that the car is being recalled for a safety defect.

Hartigan's letter said that NHTSA's failure to order Audi to send an official defect notification letter is "shocking." He claimed NHTSA has the legal authority to grant Illinois' petition to force Audi to repurchase 5000s.

On Dec. 9, NHTSA Administrator Diane Steed wrote to Hartigan, saying that NHTSA could not force a recall until it: makes an initial determination of a safety-related defect by finding the malfunction; allows an open comment period; holds a public hearing; then issues a final determination. If the manufacturer still refuses to recall, only then can NHTSA get the Justice Department to take the maker to court to force the recall, the Steed letter said.

Steed cited the General Motors X-car brake case, in which the Justice Department took GM to court in 1983 because of alleged brake lockup. However, in that instance, NHTSA actually skipped the final determination phase because it judged the X-cars so dangerous.

Hartigan's letter charged that under case law, NHTSA indeed has the legal authority to order a recall based on the incidence of defects alone — whether or not NHTSA can find out what is causing the sudden unintended acceleration. (NHTSA closed the books on other acceleration investigations when it could not find a cause.)

Hartigan cited a Dec. 16 letter he sent to Steed, saying that more than 800 reports of unwanted acceleration in Audis is more than enough. His letter said he finds NHTSA's "oppressively narrow reading" of the law "the more perplexing" because the Justice Department's case against GM regarding X-body brake lockup used the same performance defect argument.

Audi said it has lived up to both the spirit and letter of the law with its voluntary recall. "Audi has acted in a responsible manner and has voluntarily recalled all 1978 to 1986 Audi 5000s equipped with automatic transmissions. . . . We have made tremendous progress with our shift-lock installation, as already some 130,000 shift-locks have been installed to date, which has resulted in a dramatic drop in the rate of reported incidence of unintentional acceleration," the company said.

Buffalo Grove, Ill., is the site of the first death attributed to a "runaway" Audi 5000, and Hartigan has been active in working with the Center for Auto Safety and in urging NHTSA to force Audi to buy back cars.

NHTSA granted a petition by the Center for Auto Safety and the New York attorney general by opening an investigation into Audi 5000s equipped with automatic transmissions. On Aug. 5, it upgraded its investigation "and is continuing it on an expedited basis," Steed wrote to Hartigan. NHTSA also is monitoring Audi's voluntary recall.

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Ford averts lawsuit by agreeing to modify Econolines

By Helen Kahn
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

WASHINGTON — Under threat of a lawsuit from the Virginia attorney general, Ford Motor Co. has agreed to modify nationwide all 1983 through 1987 Ford Econoline cutaway chassis and vans to relieve fuel system overpressurization.

The flaw was believed to cause fuel spurting and possible fires in a potential of 10,000 to 11,000 vehicles.

Virginia Attorney General Mary Sue Terry announced Ford will have repair kits available by May 15. Ford and ambulance makers will work with federal, state and local officials on maintenance and operating procedures for the affected vehicles. Ford will provide the parts and a limited number of Ford dealers will make the repairs; the ambulance makers will inspect the vehicles. A plan for the joint effort is due by April 24. Notification of owners and users will also be coordinated.

Ford Safety Director Robert H. Munson confirmed the plan. He added that Ford and the Ambulance Manufacturers Division of the National Truck Equipment Association plan to bring to the attention of regulatory officials their concern about excessive gasoline volatility in some areas of the country. Munson warned of the need to tighten volatility standards, particularly in warm-weather states.

In fact, it was Virginia's concern over coming warm weather that pushed Ford and the ambulance makers into setting its timetable. A senior official in Virginia's attorney general office confirmed that at a late-night meeting, Terry told Ford Vice President Helen O. Petrauskas that she had two versions of a speech for the next morning.

One was to announce a decision by Ford and the ambulance makers to recall in a timely fashion.

The other was that her office planned to sue Ford and the ambulance makers over the persistent problem of fires caused by fuel spurting or "excessive" idling.

The letter of agreement with Ford was signed at 9:30 p.m. April 7, and Terry made the recall announcement the following morning to the consumer protection seminar of the National Association of Attorneys General meeting in Richmond.

By coincidence, also on April 8, Virginia Gov. Gerald Baliles signed a bill enabling the state attorney general to act on behalf of local rescue squads — thus expanding her existing authority to take legal action on behalf of emergency medical operations owned or controlled by the state. This authority was sought by Terry because she believed certain localities were especially vulnerable to unsafe ambulances.

Last month, Terry had notified Ford of two recent incidents of ambulance fires in her state.

On April 7 — the same day Virginia was negotiating with Ford over allegedly unsafe ambulances — Philip W. Davis, director of NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation, wrote to Ford's safety director, Munson. He noted that reports of more than 150 fuel expulsions with three resultant fires warranted a recall, and that unless Ford agreed, a formal defect investigation with a public notice would be forthcoming.

The NHTSA letter said: "If the vehicle is built in stages, its final stage manufacturer would ordinarily be responsible for conducting the recall. If the vehicle is instead produced by altering a previously completed vehicle, the alterer

see FORD, page 74

Fewer buyers in Class 8 field

By Joseph Bohn
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Volvo White marketing studies show that heavy-truck purchases are increasingly concentrated among fewer, higher-volume customers and that retail sales are similarly concentrated among higher-volume dealers.

Terry Young, Volvo White marketing director, said there were 14,000 fewer Class 8 customers in the 1980s than in the 1970s. That occurred despite the supposedly high number of new entrants into the market since deregulation of the industry in 1982.

Essentially, more sales are being concentrated among fewer buyers.

Volvo-White divided all the Class 8 vehicles retailed during 1979-85 among four groups of buyers and compared that to a similar market segmentation study for 1973-79.

For the first group, the study showed that the top one percent of the Class 8 buyers purchased an average of 1,515 units each during the 1979-85 period. That was up from an average of 925 units purchased by that same group during the 1973-79 period.

For the second buying group, the top 1.6 percent of the buyers purchased an average of 66 units each during the 1979-85 period. That compared with an average of 48 units during the earlier period.

Buyers in the third group averaged seven units compared with five during the 1973-79 period.

About 83.7 percent of truck purchasers were represented by the fourth group during 1979-85. That buying group averaged one truck purchase apiece.

During 1973-79, some 80.3 percent of buyers were represented by that bottom-quarter group. They also averaged one truck purchase apiece.

Volvo White officials pointed to sales trends in which more trucks would be bought by independent trucking companies and for-hire carriers and fewer by the private carrier segment. Sales to construction, mining, utility and sanitary services customers are expected to hold steady.

Company officials said that during 1980-85, independents accounted for an average of 20 percent of Class 8 truck purchases. In 1989-90, they believe that group will account for 22 percent of truck purchases.

Again, they expect the for-hire carriers, who accounted for an average 26 percent of Class 8 purchases during 1980-85, to account for an average 30 percent of purchases during 1989-90.

On the other hand, they see private carriers accounting for only 33 percent of Class 8 purchases in 1989-90, down from an average of 39 percent.

The construction and mining market segment will continue to account for 7 percent of Class 8 purchases and the utility and sanitary services segment for 8 percent, officials believe.

Volvo White had been moving toward a higher concentration of sales among fewer dealers even before its joint venture with General Motors.

Young said that 71 of the company's 194 dealers retailed more than 50 units last year, up from 62 dealers with that kind of volume in 1985 and only 19 in 1982.

The company had 20 such high-volume dealers in the Northeast, 17 in the Midwest, 16 in the Southeast, 11 in the West, and 7 in the Southwest.

The new Volvo GM Heavy Truck Corp. plans to have a 300-dealer network by January, 210 fewer dealers than the current combined total for GM and Volvo.

Barr chosen Dealer of Year

Barr, left, receives award from Business Week's Terry Sweeney

DALLAS — Richard S. Barr, a Navistar/Mercedes-Benz/Freightliner dealer from Maryland, won the 1987 Business Week/ATD Truck Dealer of the Year award.

Barr is president of Barr Transportation Center in Delmar, Md., and Barr International Inc. in Salisbury, Md.

Three other finalists honored as regional award winners were:

- C. Mack Moore, president of Preston Motors Inc., Kingswood, W.Va. (Midwest region). Moore is a Navistar dealer.
- C.E. (Gene) Allen, president and general manager of Carmenita Truck Center, Santa Fe Springs, Calif. (Western region). Allen is a Ford/Volvo White/Western Star/Hino dealer.
- Ben Bruckner Jr., president of Bruckner Truck Sales, Amarillo, Texas (Southern region). Bruckner is a Mack dealer.

Barr was the Eastern regional as well as national winner.

Barr told Automotive News that he would like to see greater efforts by dealers and manufacturers to resolve their differences.

He also considered it very important for manufacturers to listen more closely to dealers, particularly in product planning.

And he emphasized the difficulty of turning a profit.

"Truck dealers are an exceptional group of business people who can't afford the margin of error available to some other types of businesses," Barr noted.

"They spend a great deal of time and effort (running their franchises), and they are stepping up to meet a lot of very tough challenges, he added.

Barr, a frequent Navistar award winner, serves on the National Automobile Dealer Association and Navistar NADA 20 Group, the Mercedes-Benz Freightliner district dealer council and the Maryland Motor Truck Association.

Light-Duty March, Year-to-Date Sales

	March		Year-to-Date	
	1987	1986	1987	1986
Vans	17,940	16,387	42,067	40,374
Aerostar	13,916	11,954	34,192	28,354
Club Wagon	2,581	2,076	6,793	5,767
Ranger	31,530	22,529	76,838	67,094
Bronco	4,833	4,426	11,831	11,184
Bronco II	9,073	8,012	26,533	19,985
Pickups	52,253	40,403	122,627	120,539
Ford	**132,126**	**105,787**	**329,881**	**293,297**
Vans	9,578	11,399	22,533	28,784
Sportsvan	1,400	1,604	3,136	4,024
Astro	11,781	13,107	31,401	32,141
S-10	22,006	16,531	56,720	50,206
S-10 Blazer	12,465	14,046	35,989	35,407
El Camino	1,086	1,474	3,018	5,965
Blazer	2,864	3,608	7,018	9,597
Suburban	4,695	4,813	11,412	12,063
Pickups	40,461	33,707	91,195	105,000
Chevrolet	**108,336**	**108,289**	**282,442**	**283,187**
Vans	5,565	6,231	14,302	14,033
Ram Wagon	2,896	4,076	7,641	8,416
Voyager	10,438	10,941	22,799	27,668
Caravan	11,307	11,243	25,579	28,996
Mini Ram Van	1,255	1,579	3,196	3,941
Ram 50	6,880	6,158	17,411	18,451
Raider	1,448	0	3,762	0
Ramcharger	2,821	1,551	6,371	4,157
Dakota	9,331	0	23,630	0
Pickups	11,342	7,323	25,621	23,451
Chrysler	**65,283**	**49,102**	**150,314**	**129,115**
Vans	3,256	3,186	8,870	9,450
Safari	2,806	3,003	6,966	7,314
S-15	4,547	4,034	11,939	11,994
S-15 Jimmy	3,335	3,397	9,024	8,799
Jimmy	682	771	1,844	1,966
Caballero	122	191	384	760
Suburban	1,640	1,509	4,029	4,126
Pickups	11,029	8,638	24,396	26,933
P Model	432	309	1,509	945
W-4	149	96	354	249
GMC	**28,998**	**25,136**	**69,315**	**71,569**
Wrangler/CJ	2,355	1,991	6,318	9,480
Wagoneer	1,007	847	3,076	2,563
Cherokee	6,493	7,453	24,912	22,695
Grand Wagoneer	1,057	1,175	3,241	3,819
Comanche	2,889	2,232	8,958	8,231
J-10/J-20	72	108	391	378
Jeep	**15,873**	**13,806**	**46,865**	**47,166**
Toyota	28,046	34,745	66,886	90,153
Nissan	14,049	22,862	35,330	52,786
Mazda	10,915	11,971	27,831	30,312
Isuzu	8,589	8,605	21,673	21,072
Mitsubishi	3,800	2,526	11,126	6,520
Suzuki	8,267	3,706	20,601	9,312
Subaru	219	271	697	731
Range Rover	79	0	79	0
Imports	**73,964**	**83,996**	**208,498**	**210,156**
Industry Total	**419,562**	**378,857**	**1,156,344**	**1,034,478**

Nissan includes domestically built units in Tennessee

Lessors see bonus in new tax law

By Joseph Bohn
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Leasing companies are rubbing their hands in glee over the increased business they foresee from last year's Tax Reform Act.

David Burr, president and chief executive officer of Rollins Leasing Corp., Wilmington, Del., told the Truck Rental and Leasing Association convention here that many of his company's customers have expressed interest in long-term, full-service leasing. Those are customers who own vehicles and with whom Rollins has contract maintenance agreements.

Burr also predicted that full-service leasing firms would face less competition from a number of the "larger tax-oriented leasing companies."

Greyhound, for example, is trying to sell its tax-oriented leasing subsidiary.

Burr said other similar tax-oriented leasing firms — particularly smaller ones — would either curtail their operations or drop out of the business because of the new tax law.

Roger Colman, distribution control manager for Readi-Bake Inc., Grand Rapids, Mich., a lessee, said the new law has his company paying "particularly close attention" to the residual value of the vehicles it leases.

Readi-Bake leases 60 Class 8 over-the-road tractor trailers. It plans to replace about 10 to 20 units this year and, on a staggered basis, the entire 60 within the next year and a half.

Colman said, "We've always used cabover tractors. But with the new leases, we're going to switch to conventional tractors with setback axles.

"We did that mainly for driver comfort; but we're finding, as a side benefit, that conventionals have such a higher residual value and that we're actually going to benefit with a lower weekly rental than we've been paying for the past 4½ years on our old vehicles."

Readi-Bake has always been a lessee and plans to continue as such.

Colman noted that in the 1970s, with rising fuel costs, companies like his were much concerned about fuel economy.

Today, he said, entire fleets are averaging up to 6.5 to 7 mpg, indicating that the industry has done a good job of improving fuel efficiency.

Currently, his company is trying to improve the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of its drivers.

On its new tractors, it is specifying equipment like Jake brakes for safety and deluxe interiors — including air conditioning, air ride suspension and remote-control mirrors — to improve drivers' job performances.

Colman said he is looking to his lease companies and vendors for services and equipment to help cope with such future concerns as higher insurance costs and stiffer federal and state regulations.

William Slifkin, national marketing manager of vehicles for General Electric Credit Corp., Wilton, Conn., said the new Alternative Minimum Tax virtually precludes companies from completely avoiding federal income tax through standard deductions like accelerated depreciation.

Leasing will help to reduce potential AMT liability because:

- Lease rentals are not an AMT preference item, so they are not added as regular taxable income in calculating AMT income
- Since a company won't own its own equipment, there won't be any AMT preferences for accelerated depreciation or book income leasing arising from the leased equipment.

Burr called the new tax law a "nightmare and a headache. What it boils down to is that many, many U.S. companies — large corporations and small companies that run trucks — are now going to be subject to this AMT.

"That's going to cause them to pay taxes in the future when they had minimal taxes in the past. That creates a tremendous opportunity for us in the leasing business," he added.

Many companies "that had been in ownership before are now going to become lessees," he predicted.

"They're going to lease their equipment because they have one simple, direct expense for regular tax calculations, a direct expense from our lease bills, for minimum tax computations," he said. "And they don't have to go through all this recalculation of preference items as it relates to depreciation, if they had the equipment on their books."

His company is honing its sales force to promote a simplified customer presentation of why the law favors a switch to leasing.

"The AMT is the big point. You've got to get a simplified understanding of AMT and imbue salespeople in your own companies with it. That's not an easy thing to accomplish," Burr added.

The new tax law will affect "tax-oriented finance type" lessees, Burr said.

"We feel the tax-oriented leasing companies' rates will be higher in the future than in the past," he said. "And they will be offering less direct competition to us in the future. Under the new tax law, residual values are going to change. Some companies are going to have to take higher residual value risks under a tax-oriented lease."

"We think that will make them less competitive vs. a full-service lease. We think a number of companies have had unexpected problems with their tax leverage leases — their terms have been too long in some cases and the terms of their leases have gone beyond the useful operating life of the equipment," he said.

"We see a number of customers that used tax-leverage leasing in the past switching over to the operating leases where they get a full-service package from a full-service leasing company," Burr concluded.

Dealers' service, parts business rises in February

SERVICE INDEX
104.0*

	Feb., '87 vs. Feb., '86	2 mos., '87 vs. 2 mos., '86
Gross Profit on All Labor and P&A Sales	+5.6%	+2.0%
Repair Orders Written	−3.9%	−7.0%
Total Labor Sales (Customer & Warranty)	+8.1%	+4.3%
Shop Parts Sales (Customer & Warranty)	+ 2.1%	+0.7%
Sales of All P&A	+ 8.0%	+4.7%

*—Survey by Automotive News shows that dealers' service and parts business in February 1987 was 104.0 percent of business in February 1986. Service business in the first 2 months of 1987 was 100.9 percent of business in the corresponding period in 1986.

By Arthur Flax
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The Automotive News Service Index showed that service and parts business at new-car dealers climbed 4.0 percent in February, compared with February 1986.

Shop business in January was down 1.7 percent from that of the same month a year ago.

In the first two months of 1987, shop business was up 0.9 percent over the first two months in 1986.

An eastern Chevrolet dealer said, "Service volume increased during February. The increase was due to direct-mail advertising to offset a normally slow period."

A western Buick dealer attributed increased business to a flat rate increase as well as "selling more work per repair order."

Although the overall service index was up, some dealers attributed declines in service business to a lagging regional economy and mild weather.

A northwestern Ford-L-M dealer said his service profits were down some 50 percent.

An Iowa Ford dealer said, "There was no apparent reason (for a decline in business) other than the general economic shape of Iowa."

All indicators except repair orders written were positive in February.

Total labor sales (customer paid and warranty) registered the biggest gain, up 8.1 percent over February 1986. Sales of all parts and accessories climbed 8.0 percent; gross profit on all labor, parts and accessory sales rose 5.6 percent; and shop parts sales (customer paid and warranty) increased 2.1 percent.

Repair orders written fell 3.9 percent.

Parts and accessory sales to off-premises customers rose 12.8 percent in February.

Sales of all parts and accessories, up 4.7 percent, showed the largest gain through the first two months of 1987.

Total labor sales increased 4.3 percent; gross profit on all labor, parts and accessory sales climbed 2.0 percent; and shop parts sales inched up 0.7 percent.

Repair orders written were off 7.0 percent.

Parts and accessory sales to off-premises customers were up 7.9 percent through February.

Chrysler eyes sale of MoTech training school

Chrysler Motors is expected to sell its MoTech Auto Education Center in Michigan. And in an apparently unrelated development, Chrysler Mexico plans to open a technician training facility near Mexico City.

The Mexican facility will train technicians for the Latin American market.

According to a Chrysler spokesman, the company will end its involvement with MoTech when the current training class at the Livonia, Mich., school ends in December.

A source said Chrysler is negotiating to sell the school to an outside firm. Training is expected to continue under the new owner.

A nonprofit subsidiary of Chrysler, MoTech has provided training in the latest automotive service technology since it was founded in 1973. The school has trained about 8,000 students.

A Chrysler spokesman said, "We want to direct our efforts to train dealer and Chrysler employees more specifically on Chrysler products."

MoTech currently offers training in auto mechanics and auto body repair. Approximately 400 people are now attending MoTech.

Chrysler Mexico, meanwhile, plans to open its new technical training center to trainees outside Mexico.

"We are planning to bring technicians from all over Latin America," said Victor Montalvo, Chrysler Mexico's service and training manager."

The center will train about 1,200 Mexican mechanics and technicians annually and 300 other Latin American mechanics, Montalvo said.

The center, in Naucalpan, just outside Mexico City, currently employs five instructors as well as center manager Ildefonso Gonzalez Montemayor, technical adviser Juan Vivar and two secretaries.

The Mexican company is seeking Chrysler Motors approval to hire five additional instructors to cope with the anticipated influx of students.

Elaborating on that need, Vivar said: "The automotive industry is installing so much sophisticated equipment that we feel we must keep up . . . .

"From the time the car was invented until about 10 years ago there were few changes, technically speaking. There's been a revolution and we have a responsibility to train people."

Inaugurated last month, it replaces the Chrysler training center in Mexico City, which was severely damaged by earthquakes that struck Mexico City in 1985.

Montalvo, a Chrysler employee for 32 years who has been in charge of service and training in Mexico since 1965, considers the new center the "most modern in Mexico and Latin America."

Chrysler Mexico has other training centers in Guadalajara and Monterrey. The company wants to open centers in Culiacan, Veracruz and Leon.

Sixty percent of the trainees are sent by Chrysler, Mexico's 142 distributors. The remaining portion come from a variety of organizations and institutions, including the army, the highway police and car rental companies.

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SALES

Car sales climb 8.59% in Canada

March also a good month for trucks with advance of 17%

By Laura Clark
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Domestic new-car sales in Canada in March were up 8.59 percent over the total for the year-ago month.

Canadian dealers delivered 72,182 North American-built cars in March, compared to 66,470 in March 1986.

Truck sales totaled 35,282 in March, up 17.36 percent over 30,063 a year ago.

General Motors, Ford Motor Co. and Chrysler Motors continued to offer cash rebates and low interest rates on some vehicles. American Motors offered a longer warranty as the only incentive on its products.

Car sales for the first three months of the year were down 8.77 percent from the same period in 1986. The three-month total this year was 157,756 compared to 172,919 in 1986.

Four domestic carmakers showed increases in car sales over the year-ago month during March, and one was down. Honda, Canada's sixth automaker, began producing four-door Accord models in its Alliston, Ontario, plant in November 1986. It also began importing its Acura sedan and coupe to Canada in March. It sold 476 Canadian-built cars and 471 Acuras last month.

Ford posted the largest percentage gain in car sales. It sold 18,455 domestic cars last month, 10.83 percent more than the 16,651 sold in March 1986.

A Ford of Canada spokesman said the company offered cash rebates or cut-rate financing on 1987 Tempo, Topaz, Mustang and Tracer models and 1986 Lynx models. Low-rate financing on Ranger in the first half of the month was the only incentive on Ford trucks.

GM sold 37,255 cars, up 9.74 percent from the 33,946 sold in March 1986. GM offered cash-back incentives on Chevrolet Celebrity, Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera, Pontiac 6000, Buick Century and other models, according to a GM of Canada spokesman.

Sales of North American-built Chrysler cars were up 2.6 percent in March, rising to 15,417 from 15,024 in March 1986. Chrysler offered cash-back incentives ranging from $500 to $1,500 on many of its cars and light-duty trucks.

AMC sales continued to fall in March. Renault sales dropped to 350 from 659 in March 1986. AMC Eagle sales totaled 40 vs. 36 in March 1986.

Volvo sold 768 cars in March compared to 622 in March 1986. It gave no breakout, but Automotive News estimated that this year's total included 189 Canadian-built cars.

March proved to be a strong month for domestic truck sales in Canada. AMC Jeep and Chrysler posted record truck sales last month.

GM truck sales in March rose 12.04 percent, going to 14,497 from 12,939 a year ago. Ford sold 11,896, up 14.51 percent from 10,388 a year ago. Chrysler reported 7,203 domestic-truck sales, up 28.55 percent over the 5,603 sold in March 1986. AMC sold 1,686 Jeeps in March, 48.80 percent more than the 1,133 sold in March 1986.

Sales of captive imports in Canada last month were as follows:

GM sold 1,166 Suzuki-built Firefly (Sprint) models and 99 Isuzu-built Sunburst (Spectrum) models. Ford sold 833 Mercury Tracers and 30 Merkur XR4Ti models. Chrysler sold 997 Mitsubishi cars, 197 Mitsubishi trucks and 70 Peugeot cars. AMC sold 381 imported Renault cars, including 96 Medallion units, which were introduced last month.

Honda sold 6,881 Japanese-built models in addition to the 476 built in Canada.

CANADIAN SALES

	March 1987	March 1986	Pct. Change	3 mos., 1987	3 mos., 1986	Pct. Change
AMC						
Cars	340	695	−43.88	1,242	2,282	−45.57
Jeeps	1,686	1,133	+48.80	4,451	3,240	+37.37
CHRYSLER						
Cars	15,417	15,024	+2.61	32,253	37,097	−13.05
Trucks	7,203	5,603	+ 28.55	14,919	14,068	+ 6.04
GM						
Cars	37,255	33,946	+9.74	79,142	90,502	−12.55
Trucks	14,497	12,939	+ 12.04	35,191	34,587	+ 1.74
FORD						
Cars	18,455	16,651	+ 10.83	43,989	42,502	+ 3.49
Trucks	11,896	10,388	+ 14.51	30,353	28,164	+ 7.77
VOLVO						
Cars	189	154	+22.72	470	536	−12.31
HONDA	476	—	—	660	—	—
TOTAL CAR	72,182	66,470	+8.60	157,756	172,919	−8.77
TOTAL TRUCK	35,282	30,063	+ 17.36	84,914	80,060	+ 6.06

Japanese set fifth sales record at home

By Francis J. Gawronski
AUTOMOTIVE NEWS STAFF REPORTER

TOKYO — Sales of Japanese-made vehicles in their home market reached a record 4.12 million units in the fiscal year ended March 31. It marked the fifth consecutive year the fiscal record has been broken.

The Japan Automobile Dealers Association said March's domestic-vehicle sales volume — 588,697 — eclipsed the previous record of 571,557 units set in March last year.

At the same time, Japan Automobile Importers Association figures show that demand for imported cars in March achieved the 39th year-to-year monthly increase with a record 9,495 sales.

March's domestic total brought domestic sales for the fiscal year to a record 4,120,596 units, an increase of 2.3 percent from the previous year's 4,028,132 units.

The dealer association attributed March's increase to sales drives by all manufacturers on the domestic front to compensate for the export slump caused by the yen's appreciation.

March domestic-car sales increased by 1.7 percent to 437,976 units. Sales of Japanese-built trucks climbed 6.9 percent to 146,880 units, and buses were up 3.9 percent to 3,841 units.

Meanwhile, the import association noted that March's import volume of 9,495 units was 40.2 percent above the 6,773 cars sold in the same month a year ago. It was sufficient to move ahead of the previous monthly import high of 7,729 set last December.

Cumulative sales of import cars during the first three months of calendar 1987 totaled 19,555 units, an increase of 39.8 percent over the 13,988 sold in the same period last year.

The association attributed the sharp rise in import car sales to dealers lowering prices due to the yen's appreciation, and to a reduction in interest on car loans.

March import sales figures include 3,574 regular-size cars (up 42.2 percent from last year's 2,513 units) and 5,921 compact cars (up 39.0 percent from the 4,260 sold last year).

West German cars took the lion's share of the the import sales in March with 7,322 units. BMW was top among the West German cars with 2,343 units, followed by Volkswagen with 2,309 and Mercedes-Benz with 1,719.

However, the biggest percentage gains were recorded by U.S.-built cars. Their increase was 112.3 percent to 450 units, compared with 212 the year before. Swedish sales jumped 69.0 percent to 419 units compared with 248 a year ago.

Landover Group to buy 2 SKF Industries' firms

KING OF PRUSSIA, Pa. — SKF Industries, a bearing manufacturer here, has agreed to sell its California-based Dura-Bond Bearing Co. and Eurasian Automotive Products units to the Landover Group, based in Radnor, Pa.

The Landover Group operates Hansa Products, Landover, Md., a regional distributor of imported auto parts. Hansa will retain its current management and will operate the former SKF firms separately.

Landover Eurasian Co. has been formed to operate Eurasian Automotive, a national imported parts distributor. Landover Dura-Bond Co. has been formed to operate Dura-Bond Bearing, which manufactures specialized engine parts.

Raymond B. Langton, president of the SKF automotive parts unit, said the sale of the two SKF operations reflects the company's desire to concentrate on its core business of manufacturing and marketing roller bearings for automotive, aerospace and industrial uses.

The sale is expected to be completed by mid-April.

IMPORT SALES BY MODEL

	March 1987	March 1986	3 Mos., 1987	3 Mos., 1986
ACURA	8,774	704	21,497	704
Integra	5,205	377	13,166	377
Legend	3,369	327	8,331	327
ALFA ROMEO	538	390	1,636	1,091
AUDI	2,489	6,088	6,533	15,865
4000S	478	1,323	1,198	3,315
4000CS Quattro	172	361	540	1,112
5000S	1,308	3,234	3,334	8,274
5000CS Turbo	200	578	545	1,757
5000CS Turbo Quattro	217	301	623	642
Coupe GT	114	291	293	765
BMW	7,504	8,030	19,077	20,576
318i	2	169	6	654
524 TD	10	212	22	642
325	5,294	5,249	13,561	12,788
528e	981	1,017	2,557	2,673
535i/535iS	583	550	1,471	1,540
635CSI	188	268	481	712
7-Series	326	565	812	1,569
M5	39	0	40	0
M6	81	0	127	0
CHEVROLET	10,571	14,510	29,314	34,689
Spectrum	6,673	9,149	17,934	19,016
Sprint	3,898	5,361	11,380	15,673
CHRYSLER/MITSUBISHI	11,269	12,388	29,662	35,490
Colt	6,710	8,826	18,548	26,121
Conquest	1,522	526	3,243	1,421
Vista	3,037	3,036	7,871	7,948
HONDA	21,536	30,554	63,815	101,378
Civic/CRX	9,953	14,423	28,415	54,654
Accord	7,183	9,185	21,116	27,089
Prelude	4,400	6,946	14,284	19,635
HYUNDAI	19,502	10,432	56,164	11,020
ISUZU	1,917	2,791	5,489	9,804
I-Mark	1,415	1,569	3,557	4,980
Impulse	499	1,222	1,932	4,824
JAGUAR	1,545	1,968	4,068	4,652
XJ6	1,119	1,573	3,001	3,720
XJS	426	395	1,067	932
MASERATI	60	151	180	413
MAZDA	19,188	23,561	40,280	62,002
323	7,541	7,048	15,556	20,744
626	7,753	11,380	16,168	27,835
RX-7	3,894	5,133	8,556	13,423
MERCEDES BENZ	7,946	7,510	22,120	22,577
190	1,679	1,296	4,817	5,780
260E	524	0	1,193	0
300	2,164	1,805	6,018	6,376
300SDL Turbo	662	127	1,739	189
420SEL	1,194	1,470	3,304	4,531
560SEL	552	865	1,640	2,214
560SL	981	1,095	2,889	2,790
560SEC	190	222	470	696
MERKUR	1,219	1,363	2,115	3,726
MITSUBISHI	6,431	4,089	14,071	12,937
Starion	531	502	1,378	1,601
Cordia	351	480	983	1,404
Tredia	308	797	971	2,681
Mirage	1,322	860	3,646	3,158
Galant	867	1,450	3,081	4,093
Precis	2,457	0	2,457	0
Van/Wagon	595	0	1,555	0
NISSAN	41,824	33,357	110,452	101,405
Sentra	14,608	7,939	38,256	23,623
Pulsar	6,648	4,217	18,156	12,054
Stanza	5,988	3,283	17,637	12,107
Maxima	7,938	8,539	23,154	25,904
200SX	3,076	4,256	9,819	13,075
300ZX	3,344	5,123	11,605	14,118
Hawaii	222	0	825	524
PEUGEOT	714	1,292	2,261	3,405
PORSCHE	2,394	2,545	5,863	6,407
924S	273	0	582	0
944	567	1,051	1,402	2,761
944S	278	0	735	0
944 Turbo	244	552	661	1,270
911 Coupe	406	410	1,023	1,052
911 Turbo	150	134	312	316
911 Cabriolet	288	155	526	392
928S	188	243	522	616
RENAULT	1,139	342	1,139	966
18i	0	186	0	470
Fuego	0	156	0	495
Medallion	1,139	0	1,139	0
SAAB	3,817	3,752	10,762	10,200
900	812	1,102	2,231	3,059
900S	1,119	1,151	3,309	2,891
900 Turbo	792	565	2,055	1,718
9000S	340	0	661	0
9000 Turbo	681	885	2,374	2,395
Tourist	73	49	133	137
STERLING	1,535	0	2,578	0
SUBARU	13,862	16,957	34,943	48,399
Hatchback	663	1,627	1,990	4,562
3-Door	1,153	927	2,887	1,857
4-Door Sedan	3,538	5,540	8,637	15,190
XT	1,938	2,466	4,627	6,428
Station Wagon	5,665	6,669	14,719	20,322
Justy	905	0	2,083	0
TOYOTA	37,099	39,006	101,117	124,291
Corolla	7,885	8,544	19,481	28,580
Tercel	6,287	5,835	16,262	17,003
Celica	4,905	7,038	14,901	24,340
Supra	1,865	1,938	6,128	2,715
Camry	10,909	8,728	29,837	28,950
Cressida	1,583	2,411	4,957	6,957
Land Cruiser	380	213	989	994
Van	1,410	1,279	3,477	4,567
4Runner SR 5	96	729	314	1,850
MR2	1,455	1,564	3,503	6,839
Hawaii	324	429	988	1,496
VOLKSWAGEN	9,959	13,008	23,882	33,781
Cabriolet	1,204	1,406	2,857	3,277
Jetta	5,867	8,750	14,466	23,707
Vanagon	880	967	2,092	2,564
Quantum	524	949	1,415	2,193
Scirocco	587	936	1,618	2,040
Fox	897	0	1,436	0
VOLVO	10,562	10,336	32,224	31,459
240 Series	5,185	4,881	15,791	15,175
740 Series	4,206	4,314	12,725	12,432
760 Series	1,070	834	3,426	2,878
780	0	0	1	0
Tourist	101	307	281	974
YUGO	4,572	1,819	13,805	6,378
IMPORT TOTAL	246,966	246,945	664,046	703,614